



# Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • [www.scdhec.gov](http://www.scdhec.gov)

## *Vibrio Vulnificus*

<b>What Is <i>Vibrio Vulnificus</i>?</b>	<i>Vibrio vulnificus</i> is a bacterium that normally lives in warm seawater. Oysters, in particular, can be contaminated with <i>V. vulnificus</i> because the bacterium is naturally present in marine environments. <i>V. vulnificus</i> does not alter the appearance, taste, or odor of oysters.
<b>What are the symptoms?</b>	<p>Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, fever, or shock following the ingestion of raw seafood, especially oysters, or with a wound infection after exposure to seawater.</p> <p><i>V. vulnificus</i> can also cause an infection of the skin when open wounds are exposed to warm seawater; these infections may lead to skin breakdown and ulceration. Persons who are immunocompromised are at higher risk for invasion of the organism into the bloodstream and potentially fatal complications.</p>
<b>How is <i>Vibrio Vulnificus</i> treated?</b>	<i>V. vulnificus</i> infection is treated with antibiotics.
<b>How do people catch this disease?</b>	Persons who are immunocompromised, especially those with chronic liver disease, are at risk for <i>V. vulnificus</i> when they eat raw seafood, particularly oysters. The bacterium is frequently isolated from oysters and other shellfish in warm coastal waters during the summer months. Since it is naturally found in warm marine waters, people with open wounds can be exposed to <i>V. vulnificus</i> through direct contact with seawater. There is no evidence for person-to-person transmission of <i>V. vulnificus</i> .
<b>What can be done to stop the spread of this disease?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not eat raw oysters or other raw shellfish.</li> <li>• Cook shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels) thoroughly. For shellfish in the shell, either a) boil until the shells open and continue boiling for 5 more minutes, or b) steam until the shells open and then continue cooking for 9 more minutes. Do not eat those shellfish that do not open during cooking. Boil shucked oysters at least 3 minutes, or fry them in oil at least 10 minutes at 375°F.</li> <li>• Avoid cross-contamination of cooked seafood and other foods with raw seafood and juices from raw seafood.</li> <li>• Eat shellfish promptly after cooking and refrigerate leftovers.</li> <li>• Avoid exposure of open wounds or broken skin to warm salt or brackish water, or to raw shellfish harvested from such waters.</li> <li>• Wear protective clothing (e.g., gloves) when handling raw shellfish.</li> </ul>

**SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL**

Region 7

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